



**The tomb is empty...the grave-clothes are still there!**  
**A study on John 18-21**

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## **The Gospel of John: Lesson plan**

- Lesson 1 — Apr 15 — Jesus' ministry is so...unique! (John 1-3)
- Lesson 2 — Apr 22 — A deep-deep understanding about faith! (John 4-7)
- Lesson 3 — Apr 29 — Jesus IS God! (John 8:1-12:11)
- Lesson 4 — May 6 — Serving like this is unheard of! (John 12:12-14:31)
- Lesson 5 — May 13 — Living a powerful life (John 15-17)
- Lesson 6 — May 20 — The tomb is empty...the grave-clothes are still there! (Jn 18-21)

### **John 7:39 and 18:1-11, Glorified at the cross**

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is truly being glorified at the cross, as we read in John 7:39. Jesus is confidently making His way towards the cross, because it is there that His glory will be revealed when He is resurrected, and ascends into heaven to take His place at the right hand of God! Therefore, in the Gospel of John, there is no mention of the prayer in Gethsemane, becoming so intense that Jesus' sweat became like drops of blood (Luke 22:39-46). He is also not betrayed by Judas' kiss—in fact, Judas simply stands idly by (John 18:5). Jesus, knowing exactly what is coming (John 18:4a), announces Himself with Godly authority (v. 5), at which point everyone present “fell to the ground” (v. 6)! He also arranges for the safety of His disciples (v. 8), and reprimands Peter, striking Malchus' ear, with: “Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?” (v. 11)!

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### **John 18:12-40, Jesus' Kingdom**

Verse 12 begins with Jesus being arrested and brought to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the most important priest (“high priest”) (vv. 12-13), who was also the leader of the most important Jewish council (Sanhedrin) at that point (v. 14). Caiaphas convinced the Jews that it would be better to kill Jesus (“one man”), than getting the entire nation in trouble with the Romans (v. 14).

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and could get into Caiaphas' courtyard, because the disciple with him knew Caiaphas (vv. 15-16). As Jesus predicted, Peter then denies knowing Jesus three times (vv. 17-18, 25-26). While Peter cowers before his accusers and denies everything, Jesus stands up to them and answers truthfully...once again typical to the contrasts we encounter throughout the Gospel of John.

As Jesus' interrogation began He challenged Annas (still acknowledged as high priest by many, see Lk 3:2 and Acts 4:6) on grounds of Him always being very open in His teaching—He was always simply in the synagogues or at the temple (vv. 19-20). Therefore Jesus concludes

that all should already know what He said (v. 21), and hitting Him for sharing the truth is just wrong (vv. 22-23). From here Jesus is sent by Annas to Caiaphas, acknowledged as high priest by the Romans.

From Caiaphas the Jews took Jesus very early the morning to the Roman governor, Pilate (v. 28a). Pilate came outside to hear what they had to say, as the Jews couldn't enter his palace in order to stay pure for the Passover (v. 28b). They share with Pilate that he has to handle the trial as they need Jesus to get the death penalty (just as Jesus had predicted, v. 32) (vv. 29-31). For this reason Pilate starts to interrogate Jesus, and learn from Jesus that "His Kingdom is not of this world" (v. 36a), but from the above (v. 36c)...or else it would make sense that His followers would have fought against this arrest (v. 36b)! It is important to recognize that this is the moment in John's Gospel where the Kingdom of God (3:3, 5) is also fully identified with the Kingdom of Jesus! Jesus states clearly that He is a King, and that He was born to testify to exactly this truth (v. 37a), a truth that determines who will listen to Jesus, and who not (v. 37b). Pilate, like so many in the Gospel of John, struggles to identify what the truth is, or simply just doesn't wanna hear it (v. 38a).

Pilate, finding Jesus innocent (v. 38), then follows the Passover custom to release a man. He gives the Jews a choice between Jesus and another prisoner (vv. 38-39), but the people choose a notorious rebel, Barnabas (v. 40)...ironically a man who does endanger the peace with Rome!

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**John 19:1-42, Jesus' Death showing who He is**

Jesus gets flogged, a thorn crown gets put on His head, and the soldiers make fun of Him by dressing Him in a purple robe, while mocking and striking Him (vv. 1-3). Pilate tries several times to help Jesus' accusers to see that they had "no basis for a charge against Him" (vv. 4, 6b,

12a). However, the Jews didn't want to hear it, and kept pushing for Jesus to be crucified (vv. 5-6), claiming that the law requires for Him to die as Jesus said He was the Son of God (v. 7). They even played the political card, pointing out that protecting Jesus, the "king", would mean that Pilate is against Caesar (v. 12)! This became the final straw that brought Pilate to give the Jews their way around noon, as they were preparing for the Passover, to have Jesus crucified (vv. 13-16)...sadly leaving the chief priests to even say right before Passover, "We have no king but Caesar" (v. 15b)! However, we also had this precious moment where Jesus gets sentenced as people are getting the passover lamb ready to become our Passover Lamb!

In the midst of this trial we have another precious moment where Pilate takes Jesus aside to ask Him again where He is from (vv. 8-9a). When Jesus doesn't answer (v. 9b) Pilate points out that he has the power to set Jesus free (v. 10), which gives Jesus the opportunity to share in typical Johannine style that ONLY GOD is in CONTROL of this entire trial—the true power is from Above, and therefore the people who are guilty here are the ones who handed Jesus over to Pilate (v. 11).

So, with God in control as we have seen throughout the entire Gospel of John, Jesus is then led to Golgotha to be crucified, with no mention of anyone helping Jesus to carry His cross (v. 17). Amidst two criminals Jesus hangs, with a note on His cross that said "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (v. 19), which of course infuriated the Jews as it was written in all three of the important languages of the day (Aramaic, Latin and Greek), and so close to the city many Jews would read that (v. 20). The chief priests rather wanted it to say that Jesus "claimed" this, but Pilate refused to change a word he had written (vv. 21-22)!

Even the soldiers were simply fulfilling God's well laid out plan (Psalm 22:18) by not dividing Jesus' undergarment, but rather casting the lot to see who would get it (vv. 23-24).

Here on the cross is also where Jesus redefines relationships—not only is He arranging care for His earthly mother, but He is also challenging us as believers to see a new bond between us as children of God, being part of a new family in Him (vv. 25-27)!

Jesus is almost done now, as He says "I am thirsty" (v. 28), as He should to fulfill Scripture (probably alluding to Psalm 22:15). Sour wine is pressed to His lips (v. 29). This "wine vinegar" (sour wine) was cheap, diluted with water, and often used by the soldiers, and who knows, this somewhat kind gesture might have been done by the same soldier who later confessed Jesus as the Son of God (Mk. 15:39). So, this vinegar wine is given to Jesus with a sponge at the tip of a hyssop stalk, which was pretty weak, but then again didn't need to be too strong as Roman crosses weren't tall at all. Interesting enough though, hyssop branches were also used to daub the lintels and doorposts with blood in Egypt that night long ago, protecting the

Israelites from the angel of death to pass over them...thus clearly connecting Jesus' death to the Passover Lamb!

Jesus can finally declare "It is finished" as He dies (v. 30). Again, Jesus "gives up His spirit", nobody takes it from Him (10:11, 17-18). Not only is Jesus' work of *revelation* completed, but also His work of *redemption*!

Of course all of this happens on the Friday, again, as people are getting ready for Passover, and such an important day, because this year the Passover and the Sabbath were on the same day (v. 31a). Jewish bodies were not allowed to be on the cross during a Sabbath, which is why the Jews asked for the legs to be broken so that they would die quicker (as this prevented the crucified to push their bodies up to keep breathing longer by keeping their chest cavities open) (v. 31b). However it was not necessary to break Jesus' legs, as He was already dead (vv. 32-33), and instead a soldier simply pierced His side to double check (v. 34)—Jesus was dead, and it is important that we need to know that this is the truth: Jesus did die (v. 35)...a truth that others would soon doubt and spread lies about! Once again Scripture is fulfilled through Jesus' bones not being broken (Ex. 12:46, Num. 9:12, Ps. 34:20), and His side being pierced (Zech. 12:10).

Two of Jesus' secret followers, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, then came to give Jesus an honorable burial (new tomb and an amount of spices equal to a royal burial!) (vv. 38-42), or else Jesus would simply have ended up with all the others, dumped by the Roman soldiers in shallow graves surrounding the crosses.

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**John 20:1-18, The tomb is empty...the grave-clothes are still there!**

The sun wasn't even up yet when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, and saw the stone was removed from the entrance to the tomb (v. 1)! Immediately she went to get Peter and John to come and help her figure out what happened with Jesus' body (vv. 2-6a)! They could only find the linen (v. 6b), the burial cloth neatly folded (v. 7), proving that Jesus' body was not stolen as the Jewish leaders tried to proclaim. This is also so different from Lazarus coming out of the grave still wrapped up (11:44)—**the only thing that makes sense is that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, the conclusion that John had to come to as he "saw and believed" (vv. 8-9)!**

While the John and Peter went home (v. 10), Mary is still heartbroken (v. 11), but then have an encounter with two angels (v. 12) helping her to "find" Jesus (v. 13) as she turns and "saw Jesus standing there" even though she's still thinking He's the gardener (vv. 14-15) till Jesus speaks her name (v. 16a)! The sheep surely knows the voice of the Shepherd (10:3-4), as Mary immediately recognizes Jesus (v. 16b).

Mary should not hang on to, or cling to Jesus (in the physical sense of the word), because now is the time to act with joy—she should return to the disciples with great news: The tomb is empty, the grave-clothes are still there, she saw the risen Lord, and He will soon return to His Father, who is also their Father and God—they are now truly part of the family of God (vv. 17-18)!

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**John 20:19-31, Don't fear, just "GO"!**

The resurrected Jesus wants to make sure that He doesn't leave His children behind, alone, and in crippling fear (v. 19)! They need to have peace and joy (vv. 19-21a), and they need to have the Holy Spirit (v. 22), because they need to go—Jesus is sending us, just as He was sent

(v. 21b), so that we can do this amazing thing: Introduce the people of God to the Savior of this world, so that their sins can be forgiven (v. 23), and they can be called “children of God” (1:12)! It is time to stop “doubt” and “believe” (v. 27); it is time to confess: “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28); it is time to believe without “seeing” that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God (v. 29), and it is time to be filled with joy that we can have “life in His Name” (v. 31)!

Once again we see that the miracles are not recorded simply to “amaze” us, but far more importantly to help us to “see” the unseen, to help us to see that the Kingdom of God has come near to all in Jesus Christ, to see that this Jesus is the Son of God, and that having faith in Him means to have *life* (vv. 30-31)!

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**John 21:1-14, Jesus’ presence *always* changes everything!**

Jesus appeared the third time to His disciples at the Sea of Galilee/Tiberias after His resurrection (vv. 1, 14). The disciples were busy fishing, but they caught nothing (vv. 2-3) by the time they saw Jesus, whom they didn’t recognize at first (v. 4). They only realized this must be Jesus after they followed His advice to throw the net to the right side of the boat (vv. 5-6a), and then caught a “large number of fish” (v. 6b)! Peter got so excited that he immediately jumped into the water to get to Jesus quicker (v. 7), while the other disciples got the boat and the huge amount of fish to shore (v. 8)—153 large fish to be exact (v. 11a)...a wonder that the net didn’t tear apart (v. 11b)! It doesn’t seem that any symbolic message should be attached to the amount of fish caught, except that it was so significant that they had fun actually counting the fish! They could enjoy a wonderful breakfast with the risen Lord (vv. 9-13).



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**John 21:15-25, A second chance to do great things for and with our Lord!**

Three times Peter denies Jesus, and three times Jesus confirms that He still wants to use Peter to do great things! Peter is asked 3 times if he loves the Lord, and 3 times Jesus tells Him to take care of His flock (vv. 15-17). Jesus uses the Greek *agapaō* the first two times and then *phileō* the third time for “love”. Some try to conclude different meanings from these, perhaps *agapaō* would refer more to a love like between God and man (sacrificial, divine) and *phileō* more like a love between us as humans... However, there is no doubt that these two words for love are used synonymously in the Gospel of John. Both words are used for the Father’s love for the Son (10:17; 15:9; 17:23, 24, 26/5:20), Jesus’ love for Lazarus (11:5/11:3, 36), the disciple whom Jesus loved (13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20/20:2), and the Father’s love for the disciples (14:23/16:27). It also doesn’t seem wise to make too big of an issue about the differences in Jesus’ responses to Peter (Feed My lambs; Take care of My sheep; Feed My sheep)—Jesus simply wants Peter to *sacrificially love and serve the Shepherd’s sheep!*

Peter also gets warned by the Lord that he will die a martyr’s death...difficult news, but also God glorifying to hear that even though he denied His God, God is giving him a second chance to serve Him even up to a glorifying death (vv. 18-19a)! Peter now gets invited once again to follow the Lord (v. 19b). It is funny though that Peter was curious to know about John, and what he was supposed to do (vv. 20-21), but Jesus tells Peter to simply focus on what he should do (v. 22), and that Jesus Himself will concern Him with His other disciples, and what should happen to them until He sees them again (v. 23).

John concludes his Gospel with testifying once again that this is the truth (v. 24), and that Jesus did so “many other things as well”, so many “that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” if it all was to be captured in writing (v. 25)!

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### Want to dig deeper, or just stay connected?

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